



1999-01 Biennial Report

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

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INTRODUCTION

IN THE SPRING OF 2001, SPORTFISHERS caught more “spring chinook” salmon on the Columbia River than in any season in nearly 30 years. Drawn by news of a record run, consisting primarily of hatchery-origin fish, anglers made more than 170,000 fishing trips to the Columbia, catching 26,000 salmon and generating an estimated \$15.4 million in revenue for businesses on both sides of the river. As one angler put it, “there were so many people out there you couldn’t buy a bag of chips west of Bonneville Dam.”

That fishing season on the Columbia River was remarkable for more than its record salmon run and the economic boost it gave to local communities: It was also the first time that mass-marking of hatchery-origin fish made it possible to conduct a *selective* fishery on those stocks. By requiring anglers to release any salmon with an adipose fin that hadn’t been machine-clipped at a hatchery, resource managers were able to provide protection for weak wild runs and still allow anglers access to abundant hatchery stocks.

Selective fishing is one of a variety of new strategies employed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in recent years to meet the challenge of managing the state’s fish and wildlife resources in the 21st century. On issues ranging from salmon recovery to cougar management, WDFW and its governing board, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, have developed a wide range of new approaches, partnerships and technologies to help balance the needs of both fish and wildlife in the western state with the smallest land area and a population second only to that of California.

This report, written in accordance with RCW 77.04.120, describes the status, use and management of the state’s fish and wildlife resources during the 1999-01 Biennium, the period from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2001 when many of these new strategies were developed, tested and implemented on a broad scale. It also outlines major operational changes at WDFW, itself, which have helped to unite the Department under common goals, modernize its financial systems, improve customer service and reinforce science as the basis for WDFW management decisions.



Meeting legislative mandates

Under state law (RCW 77.04.012), the Washington State Legislature has directed WDFW and the Fish and Wildlife Commission to fulfill the following mandates:

- “Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage the wildlife and food fish, game fish, and shellfish in state waters and offshore waters.”
- “Promote orderly fisheries and enhance and improve recreational and commercial fishing in this state.”
- “Attempt to maximize the public recreational game fishing and hunting opportunities of all citizens, including juvenile, disabled and senior hunters.”

Balancing these various mandates has always presented a challenge, but never more so than in the last decades of the 20th century when a growing number of native fish and wildlife species showed increasing signs of decline. While the number of licensed fishers and hunters in Washington remained relatively constant through the 1990s, the addition of one million people to the state’s general population has greatly accelerated the loss of fish and wildlife habitat critical to many species’ survival.

Conserving fish and wildlife

No other single issue commanded more attention from WDFW or the Commission in the 1999-01 Biennium than the recovery of Washington’s wild salmon, steelhead and bull trout populations. While WDFW has worked for more than a decade to minimize fishing pressure on weak native stocks and realign hatchery programs to support salmon recovery, the listing of seven additional salmon and steelhead population

Estimated Economic Value to Washington

Fishing, Wildlife Viewing and Hunting, 2001

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Examples</u>
Recreational Fishing	\$1 billion in spending¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2001 freshwater fishing, \$381 million² • 2001 Columbia River spring chinook fishery, \$15.4 million³ • Razor clam fishery, \$9.2 million⁴ • 2001 Lake Washington sockeye fishery, \$6 million⁵
Wildlife Viewing	\$1.3 billion in spending⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2000 whale watching, \$13.5 million⁷ • 2001 Issaquah Salmon Days Festival, \$7.4 million⁸ • Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival, \$200,000⁹ • 2001 Skagit Bald Eagle Festival, \$100,000¹⁰
Hunting	\$408 million in spending¹¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2000 deer hunting, \$111 million¹²
Commercial Fishing	\$289.2 million in economic impacts¹³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2000 Dungeness crab, \$38.2 million • 2000 salmon and steelhead, \$9.91 million • 2000 halibut, \$6.8 million

Source

1. 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey
2. WDFW update to 1996 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey
3. Northwest Sportfishing Association
4. Grays Harbor/Pacific County economic development councils
5. WDFW estimate using the 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey data and estimated participation levels.
6. 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey
7. WDFW update to 1998 International Fund for Animal Welfare's Whale Watching Report
8. WDFW estimate based on attendance data supplied by Issaquah Salmon Days Festival and using updated 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey data
9. Grays Harbor Chamber of Commerce
10. WDFW estimate based on attendance data supplied by Skagit Bald Eagle Festival and using updated 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey data
11. 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey
12. WDFW update to 1996 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey
13. Based on 1998 Pacific Fishery Management Council estimate of the economic benefit of the commercial fishery, calculated as 2.1 times the ex-vessel value of the catch.

groupings under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) in March of 1999 galvanized support for wild salmon recovery like never before.

The Salmon Recovery Act, approved by the Washington State Legislature in 1998, set the stage for a new era in wild salmon restoration, establishing a new network of local recovery organizations ("Lead Entities") to help prioritize and implement habitat restoration projects in watersheds throughout the state. Drawing from existing staff, WDFW created a

team of watershed stewards to provide needed technical assistance to the new Lead Entities and another science team to support the state's landmark Forests and Fish agreement – both key steps toward restoring critical salmon habitat.

Meanwhile, WDFW continued to work with tribal fisheries managers, federal agencies and fisheries organizations to design fisheries in ways that protect weak wild runs and still allow for the harvest of abundant hatchery stocks. Selective salmon fisher-

ies, first tested in 1998, were expanded to 52 recreational fisheries by 2001 when half of all returning hatchery chinook and virtually all hatchery coho were easily identifiable by their clipped adipose fin.

The WDFW Enforcement Program's newly consolidated Marine Division found that 98% of salmon anglers were in compliance with new rules requiring the release of unmarked fish and the newly constituted Fish Science Division tested two types of selective commercial salmon gear with promising results. Recovery programs for wild salmon at 21 state hatchery programs also showed clear signs of success, as the WDFW initiated a comprehensive assessment of its hatchery operations along with treaty tribes, federal agencies and a group of independent scientists.

Of course, WDFW's responsibilities don't end with salmon. As discussed in this report, the Department and the Commission took various actions during the 1999-01 Biennium to protect and conserve the state's marine fish, crab, shrimp, elk and deer as well as non-game species such as the state-endangered pygmy rabbit and western pond turtle. As part of that effort, WDFW staff developed state recovery plans for three threatened and endangered species and completed status reviews on four candidate species. Draft reviews for the bald eagle and peregrine falcon recommended downlisting those species to "sensitive," due to their growing abundance in recent years.

Providing fish and hunting opportunities

At the same time, WDFW and the Commission worked to fulfill its mandate to expand hunting and fishing opportunities wherever scientifically supportable. Continued increases in waterfowl populations allowed for the most liberal duck-hunting rules ever in 2001. Nearly 130,000 large triploid trout were planted to boost fishing opportunities at lowland lakes, while a resurgence in the coastal sardine population allowed for the first commercial sardine fishery in nearly 50 years. Thanks to the combination of selective fisheries and improving runs, salmon fishing improved year by year from 1999 through 2001.

As indicated by the example of the spring chinook fishery on the Columbia, fishing and hunting provide a major boost to the economy of local communities – and to the state as a whole. According to a

study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), anglers spent well over \$1 billion on recreational fishing trips in our state in 2001 alone, supporting businesses ranging from tackle shops to motels. Meanwhile, commercial fisheries had the fifth highest volume of landings in the nation, providing thousands of jobs from Ilwaco to Blaine.

Fish and wildlife also contribute to the state's economy in other ways. In 2001, bird watchers and other wildlife viewing enthusiasts spent \$1.3 billion in Washington communities, according to that same USFWS study. To encourage public interest in "watchable wildlife, WDFW joined with the Washington state tourism office and local communities to promote viewing opportunities throughout the state. As part of that effort, WDFW's website was expanded to include a listing of wildlife species that can be found on individual Department lands and gave viewers an opportunity to watch a pair of eagles tending their eggs in real time through WDFW's enormously popular EagleCam feature.

Managing for the 21st century

The 1999-01 Biennium was a time of dramatic change for the Department, the Commission and resource management in general. Faced with growing pressures on the state's fish and wildlife resources, WDFW drew on its scientific expertise to develop new strategies for fish and wildlife management in the 21st century. At the same time, the Department stepped up to a new, expanded role in helping governments and other organizations meet their own responsibilities for resource protection.

Important changes were also made in WDFW's basic operating systems. Old, inadequate business systems, which had contributed to a serious revenue deficit within the Department in 1998, were replaced with help from the state Legislature and the Office of Financial Management. Installation of a new, automated licensing system (Project WILD) ended the decade-old practice of processing licenses by hand, and – for the first time – allowed fishers and hunters to buy licenses over the phone or the Internet. Thanks to a new cost accounting system, revenue projection model and stringent oversight by Department management, WDFW ended the 1999-01 Biennium with money in the bank.

The Department ended the biennium stronger in other ways, too. In June 2000, all state laws governing fish

and wildlife were consolidated under a single statute, providing a common legal foundation for managing fish and wildlife for the first time since those responsibilities were merged under a single agency in 1994. Approval of WDFW's first formal strategic plan in 2001 further solidified the Department's shared sense of purpose and priorities.

Thanks to the hard work, resiliency and professionalism of Department staff, WDFW ended the biennium in a strong position to provide sound stewardship of Washington's fish and wildlife resources in the 21st century. The course is now set, and the main job ahead is to make sure that those new strategies and innovations take hold in the new century. ■



Russ Cahill
Chair
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission



Jeff Koenings
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Strategic Goals & Objectives

Mission: “Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife”

We serve Washington’s citizens by protecting, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities

I. Healthy and diverse fish and wildlife populations and habitats

Objective 1

Develop, integrate and disseminate sound fish, wildlife and habitat science.

Objective 2

Protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.

Objective 3

Ensure WDFW activities, programs, facilities and lands are consistent with local, state and federal regulations that protect and recover fish, wildlife and their habitats.

Objective 4

Influence the decisions of others that affect fish, wildlife and their habitats.

Objective 5

Minimize adverse interactions between humans and wildlife.

II. Sustainable fish and wildlife-related opportunities

Objective 6

Provide sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities compatible with maintaining healthy fish and wildlife populations and habitats.

Objective 7

Work with tribal governments to ensure fish and wildlife management objectives are achieved.

Objective 8

Improve the economic well-being of Washington by providing diverse, high quality recreational and commercial opportunities.

III. Operational excellence and professional service

Objective 9

Provide excellent professional service.

Objective 10

Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of WDFW’s operational and support activities.

Objective 11

Recruit, develop and retain a diverse workforce with high professional standards.